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Produced March 2004 / Last reviewed March 2005

University Hospitals of Leicester   
NHS Trust

## Physiotherapy Department

### Caring for Your Neck

### Information & Advice

*The aim of this leaflet is to help you understand your neck pain and manage it for long-term care.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Many people can manage their neck pain most of the time. This leaflet gives you the best and the most up to date advice on how to manage with it.

## **FACTS**

Generalized 'wear and tear' is very common as we get older. It is likened to getting grey hair, it happens to all of us. Some people get pain and stiffness, others don't, and we can't always determine why.

The best ways of managing the problem have been shown to be;

- Staying active
- Not being overprotective
- Following advice in this booklet about sensible exercise
- Trying to lead a normal a life a possible

## **GENERAL ADVICE**

1. Sit correctly - use a lumbar support if necessary. Interrupt prolonged sitting with regular intervals.
2. Lying and resting - if you awake with a stiff and painful neck that was not causing problems the night before, it is likely to be something wrong with the surface on which you're lying, or the position you're sleeping.
3. Use your pillow to support both the head and the neck. It should fill up the hollow of the neck between the head and the shoulders.

You can use a supportive roll, or a rolled up towel in the pillowcase, if you cannot mould the pillow.

4. Avoid sleeping face down, as this puts a strain on the neck.
5. Some jobs may involve you being in a static position or working in cramped positions. Interrupt prolonged postures with intervals.
6. Seek medical advice if: you have had a recent severe accident, onset of severe headaches/nausea/ dizziness/or pins and needles in the hand or fingers.

Contact:      Physiotherapy Departments  
                  Leicester Royal Infirmary      0116 258 5113  
                  Leicester General Hospital      0116 258 4073  
                  Glenfield Hospital                0116 256 3595

## Strengthening Exercises Continued...



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- Lying on your back on the floor with a roll under your neck. Press the roll into the floor by using your neck muscles.

Repeat \_\_\_ times



- Sitting. Try to bend your head forward whilst resisting the movement with your hand. Hold for approx 10 seconds.

Repeat \_\_\_ times

## POSTURE

Bad posture in sitting or lying causes prolonged overstretching of the ligaments and surrounding tissues.

By learning to keep a good posture it is possible to prevent or relieve your neck pain.

### WHAT IS GOOD POSTURE?

Keep your chin in and head up, shoulders back, tummy in and back straight. It is important to keep the natural curves of the spine. The small inward curve of the neck is called the **Cervical Lordosis**; if this is altered neck pain may develop.

During sitting, the position of the lower back strongly influences the posture of the neck. If the back slouches then it is impossible to sit with the head pulled backwards. If it is difficult to maintain the curvature in the lower back, then use a small rolled up towel, or a lumbar roll.



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Bad sitting position



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Sitting on a chair with Good back support (Lumbar roll)

## STRENGTHENING EXERCISES

Listed below are some do's and don'ts to help you understand and manage your neck pain.

### DO'S

- Stay as active as possible
- Exercise your neck. Sensible exercises won't lead to further damage
- Gradually increase exercises and activity, but be sensible about it
- Keep up with the exercises and advice for long-term management.

### DON'TS

- Don't be frightened of all pain. Some ache/discomfort during exercise is normal and part of the treatment
- Don't give in, doing less leads to weakness and stiffness
- Don't rapidly change activity otherwise you over do it and set yourself back
- Don't panic if you have a set back, rest a few days from the exercises and then restart them again
- Don't overuse soft collars, these can cause excessive stiffness. They have a short-term benefit after acute injury.



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- Sitting. Tilt your head to one side while resisting the movement with your hand. Hold for approx 10 seconds. Repeat to other side.

Repeat \_\_\_ times.

- Sitting. Try to bend your head backwards while resisting the movement with your hand. Hold for approx 10 seconds.

Repeat \_\_\_ times.



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## STRETCHING EXERCISES



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- Sitting with your hands clasped behind your head. Bend your head forwards until you feel a stretch behind your neck. Gently pull your neck further forward. Hold for approx 20 seconds.

Repeat \_\_\_ times.

- Sitting in a chair and hold on with one hand. Use this as an anchor to lower the shoulder whilst breathing out. Put the other hand over your head towards the opposite ear to tilt your head whilst at the same time turn it towards the lowered shoulder.

Repeat \_\_\_ times.



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- Sitting. Turn your head to one side until you feel a stretch. Using your hand to gently push your head further round. Hold for approx 20 seconds. Repeat on other side.

Repeat \_\_\_ times.



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## EXERCISES

The aim of the exercises is to reduce pain and restore normal function and mobility. When exercising for pain relief you should move to the edge of pain, then release the pressure and return to the starting position. When exercising for stiffness, to make it more effective, use your hand to gently apply over-pressure in order to obtain maximum movement.

It is recommended that you adopt the sitting position when starting with the exercises. Once you have mastered the exercises, you can exercise either sitting or standing.

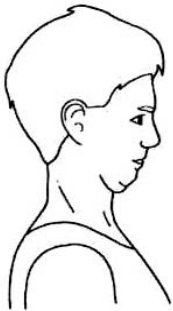
On commencing any exercise you may experience an increase in pain, this is normal and to be expected. As you continue to practice the exercises the pain should quickly diminish at least to its former level.

If the site of symptoms spreads away from the neck e.g. into the forearm, then be careful with that exercise.

Your physiotherapist will mark the exercises that you need to do.

If you have any concerns or queries regarding the exercises in this booklet then please consult a medical professional.

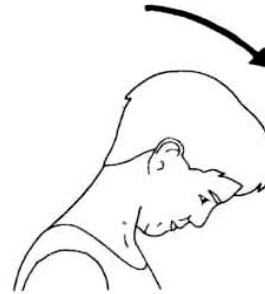
## MOBILISING EXERCISES



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- Sitting straight-backed. Pull your chin in, keeping your neck and back straight (not tipping your head forwards). Hold at the end position and feel the stretch in your neck.

Repeat \_\_\_ times.



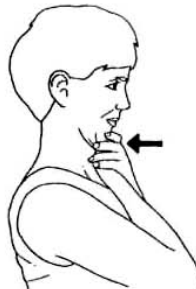
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- Sitting. Bend your head forward until you feel a stretch behind your neck. Hold for approx 30 seconds.

Repeat \_\_\_ times.

- Sitting straight backed. Pull your chin in. At the end position take hold of your chin with your hands. Push your chin carefully further backwards. Hold for a moment and feel the stretch in your neck.

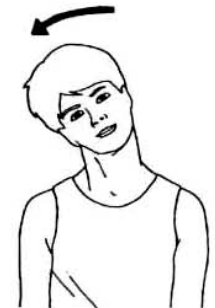
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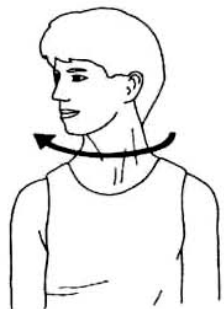
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- Sitting. Tilt your head toward one shoulder until you feel the stretch on the opposite side. Hold for approx 30 seconds. Repeat to other side.

Repeat \_\_\_ times.



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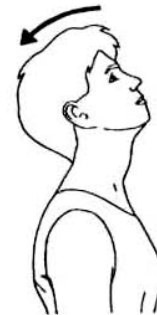


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- Sitting. Turn your head to one side until you feel a stretch. Hold for approx 20 seconds. Repeat to other side.

Repeat \_\_\_ times.



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- Sitting. Bend your head backwards as far as is comfortable. Hold for approx 30 seconds.

Repeat \_\_\_ times.

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